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ABSTRACT

This paper contains the text of a talk on how the business community should cooperate with higher education in Canada through their mutual association, the Corporate-Higher Education Forum. The paper briefly considers the differential impact of size of university in building cooperation with the business community and argues that size has only a secondary impact on capacity to cooperate in educational research. The paper goes on to look at the Forum including a review of recent activities of the Forum and the suggestion that other associations and bodies in Canada may be capturing the educational research field and addressing the issues that concern the nation while the Forum appears not to be addressing these issues. A review of the Forum's journal for the past 3 years found that of over 100 articles, not a single one was related to the research on kindergarten through 12th grade education or the preparation of professionals for schools. The paper argues that due to the lack of input from educational researchers, professionals dealing with the education crisis do so in a reflexive, strident, and defensive manner at significant cost to the nation. (JB)

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PRESENTATION AT CSSHE/CSSE PANEL ON "EDUCATIONAL TEACHING AND RESEARCH UNDER SCRUTINY"

by

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Learned Societies

Charlottetown, P.E.I.
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I have been asked to present the view of educational research held by the Corporate-Higher Education Forum, including how the Forum believes the business community should co-operate with Faculties of Education in the conduct of educational research and what it believes the products of such a co-operative research venture should be. I have also been asked to consider the differential impact of size of university in building co-operation with the business community.

Let me deal first, and quickly, with this latter subject. It is certainly true that Canadian universities with Faculties of Education vary widely in size but I believe that the size of an institution has only a secondary impact on its capacity to co-operate with the business community in educational research. The primary differentiating features, I think, are three:

1) the first is whether or not a university has a School of Business (and perhaps a School of Engineering as well) - this feature can influence the familiarity of business leaders with a university and the credibility they ascribe to it, and hence their willingness to co-operate with elements in it;

2) the second is the location of a university - those in cities where there is a significant business presence simply have better access to business leaders with whom to co-operate than those in the smaller more remote areas of our country; and

3) thirdly, the orientation of scholars within the Faculty of Education - some of us are inclined to collaborate with partners from the private sector while others of us feel threatened by them or suspicious of their motives and values - and this too can have an obvious impact on the potential for co-operation in the conduct of educational research.

Institutional size can be related to some of these features but, as I indicated, such relationships tend to be inconsistent and indirect and so I submit that the impact of size of institution tends to be only secondary in nature (and in certain notable cases with which most of us are familiar, it is either non-existent or even opposite to what one might expect).

Now let me get to the bulk of my presentation by speaking first about the Forum and its interest in education, and then drawing on my involvement in its work along with some other

experiences to share with you some views on the relationships between business interests and educational research.

The Corporate-Higher Education Forum was established in Canada, like its counterparts in the United States, Europe and Australia, to strengthen and multiply the links between the academic and business communities of our country. With 32 presidents of universities located in nine provinces and 46 senior officers of companies representing most business sectors and economic regions of Canada as its members, the Forum is dedicated to promoting understanding and co-operation between its two communities while respecting the traditional functions of each. It is not a research institution nor does it seek to impose its ideas on others except through the example of leadership. Nevertheless, its initiatives encouraging university-business co-operation in research, skills development, international business education, and corporate support for universities have contributed to lessening the "ivory tower" isolation too long characteristic of academic-business relations.

The Forum has undertaken a number of projects in the areas mentioned during its decade of existence. Since 1988, it has directed particular attention to the character and quality of elementary and secondary education in Canada. Indications of high drop-out rates among students in high school, relatively

weak performance in international scholastic achievement tests, and poor literacy and numeracy skills among new entrants to the workforce and post-secondary education were seen as symptoms of an education system unable to cope with major changes in the social and economic environment.

Accordingly, the Forum established a committee of its members from both sectors to examine these matters, the first product of which was the publication, To Be our Best: Learning for the Future. This Advisory concludes with three recommendations: set common goals for learning and indicators of success, train and support teachers to help students achieve the goals, and build community awareness and co-operation for quality in schools. The document has been used as a basis for half-day symposia involving business and education leaders in five communities across the country, and several more of these sessions are planned over the next year after which a report on the experience will be published.

In addition, the Forum's interest in the goals of education has continued to be expressed through an investigation called "Making the Match" which is seeking an understanding of the workforce skills required by business, the education and training experiences of university students and graduates in Canada, the relationships between these two sets of factors

(i.e., the adequacy of university education for corporate employment), and the means by which any gaps identified might be closed. The Forum has also launched a project to examine employer-sponsored education and training in this country as practised by both corporate and university members. And it is endeavouring to follow up on the observations advanced in To Be our Best by elaborating a Goals Statement for K-12 learning.

In this latter activity, the Forum is calling for our schools to equip their students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will render them ready for a world characterized by explosive development of new knowledge, new patterns of work, changing family structures, rapidly advancing technology, increasing global competition, and a multi-cultural society. In order to achieve that it has recommended six goals for K-12 education: inspire students to learn and achieve their personal best; ensure individual mastery of appropriate knowledge; promote the development of skills for implementing knowledge; cultivate positive attitudes, behaviour and values; equip students for entry to the workplace; and prepare and motivate students for lifelong learning. To achieve these goals, the Forum proposes that we must: set standards and bench-marks which monitor and push progress; raise expectations, and equip and support teachers to deliver on them; design curriculum, teaching methods and tests which produce desired results; inform and involve parents,

employers, colleges and universities; connect schools and the workplace to show that learning is relevant; improve ways of responding to social conditions which impede teaching and learning without compromising the goals; and manage and innovate to use limited finances more effectively. That work is ongoing and it will likely continue to be a priority for the attention of Forum members over the coming years as leaders of community action.

That brings you up to date on the interests and activities of the Corporate-Higher Education Forum in the area of K-12 education. With respect to the particular topic of this panel, however, I must emphasize that the Forum has not specified <u>how</u> business should co-operate with Education Faculties - only that it <u>should</u>. While it encourages research which addresses real problems related to student learning in our schools and applying promising research results to practice, the Forum's view is that the involvement of business representatives in the research and teaching agenda of Education Faculties should be worked out jointly, as with all "applied" fields of study.

As a Forum member with a personal interest in educational research, however, I <u>do</u> have a few observations that I want to share with you. The main one can be best expressed in the question, "Where have we been?" I fear that the research

agenda on educational performance is being captured by others - as exemplified in the work of the Conference Board of Canada; the recent report of the Economic Council of Canada; The Canadian School Boards Association; the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada; the Federal Government's Prosperity Initiative; and the efforts of various other individuals and groups external to the domain of educational researchers such as professors in Schools of Management, parent activists, judges and lawyers, university presidents and business leaders - through the Corporate-Higher Education Forum or local community counterparts and sometimes even sponsored by provincial governments, such as the study on education in New Brunswick that was released last month. I was stung, as some of you probably were, by the Economic Council's lament over the paucity of research on the performance of our educational institutions and the many important issues still requiring study which it lists in A Lot to Learn. This causes me to wonder if educational researchers are relinquishing their natural turf by default.

To test this hypothesis, I reviewed the last three years' contents of the two scholarly journals published by your respective societies - well over a hundred individual articles. I could not find a single one in The Canadian Journal of Higher Education that related even remotely to the research on K-12 education or the preparation of professionals for schools and

school systems that is carried out in our university settings. The Canadian Journal of Education had a banner year in 1989 with articles on "The Critics of Schooling" by Ruth Latta in the Fall, "Characteristics of Canadian Curricula" by David Pratt in the Summer, "Alberta Political Economy in Crisis: Whither Education" by A.M. Decore and R.S. Pannu in the Spring, and parts of the special issue on "The Education of the Gifted Child in Canada" in the Winter issue; other than that, the only article over the past three years that bore any resemblance to study of the widespread concerns about education throughout our country was John Willinsky's paper, "The Construction of a Crisis: Literacy in Canada," in the Winter issue of 1990.

It seems to me that this is pretty slim pickings when one considers that anxiety and anger about the way we are educating young Canadians are rife throughout the nation (perhaps the hottest topic in the media and general public discourse during the period I've been referring to), that educational scholars know much of this angst is based on absent, erroneous or misinterpreted data, and that the academic study of the subjects concerned is generally viewed to be a principal function of scholars in our Faculties of Education. This relative silence is uncharacteristic, and it would be interesting to speculate on its causes - although I don't have time to do so now. It is also dangerous, because widely held views are being formed and

decisions are getting made without the benefit of thorough research by those best qualified to do it.

As a result, professional educators across the country - those whom we prepared and in whom we presumably take a continuing interest - are being forced into a reflexive stance of increasingly strident defensiveness - which only serves to heighten the lack of confidence in their work and capability on the part of opinion leaders in both the public and private sectors. There is, thus, a glaring need for competent scholarship by educational researchers on the subjects of concern to the current critics of schooling in this country. And I can assure you that many of the business leaders I know would welcome such an initiative from you and, indeed, would wish to collaborate with you on it (a politically wise approach, I submit). Let me suggest a few questions that I believe they would want to help you address:

1. What are the expectations and requirements of the business community in terms of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of those coming out of high schools - both as prospective employees and as productive citizens? (Those who complain that high school graduates do not have the necessary competencies should have their feet held to the fire and be required

to specify what they think the necessary competencies are, a task that the Conference Board is working on through its "Employability Skills Profile".)

2. Similarly, what degree of familiarity do school teachers and administrators have with the nature and challenges of today's workplaces?

3. Conversely, what degree of familiarity do those in the business world have with the nature, challenges, problems, and programs that characterize the school in our contemporary society?

4. What protocols are appropriate for measuring the effectiveness of pilot projects in schools such as those which involve partnerships between business and education?

5. How effectively and clearly are the results of educational research communicated to those who could benefit from them - in schools, governments, businesses, or society at large?

6. What performance indicators are appropriate for evaluating the effectiveness of Faculties of Education

in the preparation and professional development of personnel for Canadian school systems?

These examples are not particularly erudite, but they are terribly important. We cannot afford to ignore the concerns about our schools that are being expressed so strongly across the country. Regardless of what we may think of their validity, they must be taken seriously and the noise must be elevated to more rational deliberation based on the insights gained by competent educational research. University scholars are still respected by business leaders and the public at large, and they will be listened to seriously if they will only turn some of their attention to the subject at hand. But if we refuse to address those concerns, perhaps because they are insufficiently "academic" in nature, then we place at serious risk not only the quality of Canadian education but also our own credibility and indeed our very right to participate in future debates on the issues for which we are supposed to be the primary source of expertise.

The concerns expressed by business leaders and others will continue to escalate if nothing is done to address them. Researchers in education can either let that happen and suffer the consequences (which I think would be severe) or we can engage our expertise actively in collaboration with those expressing the

concerns and inject some knowledge-based rationality into the debate. I can assure you that the latter kind of initiative would be welcomed by business leaders who know they are concerned but are also bothered that their concerns are not as knowledge-based as they would like them to be. Many of my colleagues in the Corporate-Higher Education Forum would respond very positively to such an initiative from our Faculties of Education, and I encourage you to consider it seriously.